



Stranger things season 1 Alternate: Dark Reflections by Dark Lord of Hodor

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Summary: Will is trapped in the upside down, and lacks the strength and courage to do anything more than run and hide from the carnivorous monsters that inhabit it. But when a mysterious being comes to his aid, the dark secrets and mysteries of the upside down are slowly revealed...as well as his strangely close connection with the entity. Apologies for my terrible punctuation.

1. Chapter 1

'Sh-should i stay or should i go now. If i go there will be..."

Will shivered uncontrollably in the icy, moldering darkness of the endless night, his stick-fort providing no real protection: only a tiny measure of comfort born of familiarity.

The wind howled like a beast, threatening to tear into his flimsy sanctuary and devour him.

'Should i s-stay or should i g-go now...'

Snap.

A twig broke not ten feet away.

'Please God, no...'

Will's mind flew into a panic at the sound of padding feet, which were soon accompanied by ragged, inhuman breathing.

Laying deathly still, the boy closed his eyes, and tried to calm his breathing, wishing the monstrous creature away.

Suddenly, a branch fell from a rotting tree in the distance. The creature took off to investigate the noise, and Will breathed a sigh of relief.

'GET UP! QUICK!'

The lost child nearly jumped out of his skin at the sound of another voice, and just barely stifled a yelp.

'Who-who's there?' he said apprehensively, voice as high as he dared.

'RUN NOW OR DIE, STUPID!'

Peeking carefully out of the blanket that served as a door to ensure the coast was clear, Will took a deep breath, and began running

back towards the only other place that felt halfway safe.

'Not home, idiot! They've already figured out your patterns!'

'Where do i go then?!" he hissed, not wanting the noise to attract attention.

'Go south! I'll guide you, but you have to hurry!'

Blood pumping and heart pounding, the terrified adolescent dug into the corrupted earth, running harder than he had ever run

before in his life.

'Watch the tree-bases! Some of them have spore pods on them!'

An image of an indescribably bizarre creature flashed into his mind, and he stopped not a moment too soon as he saw one attached

to a rotten tree right in his path, its cup-shaped mouth flexing and heaving as it took in the unhealthy air.

Resuming his frantic pace, Will ran to the left, just enough to avoid the creature's toxic spew, and continued on in the direction in

which the mysterious voice was leading him.

'Go left now!'

A thin sheet of sweat covered his arms and legs now, and his lungs began to burn.

'Don't stop! You're almost there!'

Pushing himself to his limit, the unlikely survivor felt his strength quickly giving out...and that was when he spotted the opening in the rock-face.

Stumbling and panting, the boy dug into his last reserve of energy and collapsed into the cave-mouth.

His vision began blurring, and black spots appeared.

'No' he thought, too exhausted to be alarmed. '*Not like this*'

Familiar faces flashed before him:

His friends Dustin, Mike, and Lucas.

His Brother, Johnathan.

The bullies.

And lastly, his Mother, staring with tearful eyes.

'Mom' he gasped '*I'm sor...*'

Unable to finish, and with tears streaming down his face, his vision went dark, and Will Byers breathed his last.

'Shhhh...not today'

2. Chapter 2

'Where am i?'

Will tried to move, but for some strange reason, he couldn't make his body obey.

In the distance, the sound of dripping water could be heard.

'Awake yet?'

The same voice that had guided him here, away from the demagorgon, Far from the dangerously familiar places that reminded him of home.

'Who are you?!" cried Will, the maddening fear of not knowing building within him. 'WHAT DO YOU WANT?!"

'LET ME GO!'

As he struggled against the invisible force in blind, animal panic, he suddenly began to see images of the people he loved before him.

'Don't give up' said Johnathan, firmly grasping his shoulders with both hands. 'This isn't the end'

He stepped aside and disappeared, only to be replaced with his best friend, Mike.

'Don't let go of your hope, Will.' he said, embracing him as only a true friend would.

Third and last was Joyce, his Mother.

'I love you so much, baby' she said, smothering him in a hug.

'It's going to be alright, son. Do you hear me?' She cupped his face in her hands. 'It's going. to be. alright.'

As the last of the apparitions disappeared, the dark, dripping cave somehow seemed a little lighter now: a little less scary.

Not enough to distract from the smell of rancid water and mildew, but still...

Though his body still shook, Will felt decidedly calmer, and relatively in control of himself.

Relatively.

'Glad to have you back' said the voice with an unmistakable note of sarcasm in its tone...but also, with an odd genuineness as well, as if Will's well being were somehow important to it.

'Where are you?' he asked, still somewhat shaky.

'You 'still' haven't figured it out?' it replied in obvious annoyance.

The young teen shook his head, confused.

T'm inside of you, dope! Just how stupid are you?!"

The sudden, hateful venom in its voice, combined with the revelation that this unknown 'thing' was inside his mind was only offset by the eerie realization that it was now speaking with Will's voice.

'You died, Will. remember?'

Like a hammer blow, sudden memories of laying on his back, watching his life flash before his very eyes came flooding back, and a morbid sense of realization fell upon him.

'How am i still a-a-' He couldn't bring himself to utter the word.

'Alive?' The entity finished for him. *'Simple':*

'I'll never let you die' it said, puppetting Will's own mouth to voice its bizarre, cryptic words.

'AHH!' the boy yelled, jerking back in shock.

'Don't do that again!' he yelled, more angry than fearful this time.

'Or what? You'll yell at me? You're yelling at yourself!'

The entity unleashed a burst of sadistic laughter that made its unwilling host cower.

'Seriously though: you're going to have to master your fear here, or else'

'Or else what?' seethed Will, fists clenched into balls.

'Or else this world will eat you alive'

A pause. And then:

'Oh yeah, and one more thing'

'What?' the boy growled through clenched teeth.

'STOP! FUCKING! YELLING, YOU IDIOT! I can only hide the sounds you make for so long!'

3. Chapter 3

The sky pulsed with chaotic energies.

Bolts of crimson lightning illuminated the festering landscape, and rolling blasts of thunder reverberated against Will's chest.

Large, white fungal spores floated through the air, and everything smelled of rot and decay.

'Nice night, huh?' said the entity, in typical sarcastic form.

Will groaned, and rolled his eyes.

'Where are we going?' he asked in his mind

Another bolt flashed, this time close enough to be blinding.

'There's something you need to see. Also: something i need to do'

'Are you ever going to tell me who you are? 'I'll never let you die' isn't much to go on'

A long period of silence followed.

'No.'

'No? Why not?!"

Another pause.

'You're...not ready', it said, with an odd hesitation.

A growl of frustration escaped him. *'Could you be more vague?!"*

'Probably' the entity nonchalantly replied, as if they were discussing the (terrible) weather, and not the nature of their strange, quasi-symbiotic/quasi-parasitic relationship.

'Well...don't, okay?'

This caused the being to laugh again, but in a friendlier, and

decidedly less malicious manner this time.

As they made their way across the decaying terrain, the destination quickly became apparent to Will.

'The power company? Why? What's there?'

'It's not a power company: it never was. That was just a front'

Perplexed, will pressed it further.

'What is it, then?'

"was', not is' And as they approached the broken and twisted fence, feelings of dread and loathing that weren't Will's began to surface.

'Are...are you alright?' asked the host, an inexplicable feeling of concern washing over him.

A tear that wasn't his rolled down his cheek, and the entity's next words felt subdued...almost child-like.

'Bad place'

Unsure of what to say, Will simply held his tongue for a time.

Getting into the main building was easier here than it ever would have been back home:

The guard house was empty, the Entrance gate was partially opened, and there were no Guards with M-16's patrolling the grounds.

Stepping over broken glass, Will ducked inside through the futilely-locked main door, and saw something that revolted him:

A massive, fleshy web-like sac, filled to the brim with human remains: possibly hundreds, if not more.

Will felt like vomiting, but the emotions he felt from the entity within him were altogether different:

A mixture of vengeful hatred and glee.

'Who were they?' he asked, through dry heaves.

Again, that same feeling of absolute hatred washed over him.

'Bad men'

A pause. Then:

'Just...keep going'

'Where? I've never been here before'

'We need to turn the power back on. The generator room is in the basement, but getting there won't be easy'

'We've come this far, might as well finish it...whatever 'it' is'

'Finish? No: we're just getting started'

'Awesome. Maybe we can party when this is over'

He stopped for a moment, realizing that that was more like something the entity would say, and less like something Will Byers would say.

'Is there anything i need to know about this un-cool 'you being inside of me' thing?'

The being hesitated.

'Probably'

'PROBABLY? What the hell does that mean?!"

'I DON'T KNOW, OKAY?!" It fired back. *'This is my first possession!"*

Putting his head in his hands and counting to ten, the beleaguered teenager took a long, deep breath before speaking again'

'I'm not doing anything or going anywhere unless there's a way to get back to the real world'

'You mean 'your' world? Yeah, there's a way, but you have to promise that

you'll take me with you...and don't lie, okay?'

'Friends don't lie.'

'Okay' said Will, sufficiently confused. 'I don't know about 'Friends', but sure: you can come with me'

'Good, good' the feeling of relief, of the chance for salvation was almost tangible.

'There are portals that open up in random places...'

4. Chapter 3 interlude

'The subject's increasing affinity for fields previously considered theoretical at best, and works of science-fiction at worst serves not only as an undeniable sign of his potential, but of the next stage in human evolution itself. I will continue to supervise the project as needed.'

'Doctor Brenner?'

Quickly switching off the tape recorder, the project-lead stared up at the head-scientist with dangerous eyes.

'Must i remind you of your predecessor's fate, Doctor Winthrope?'

Swallowing hard, his subordinate worked swiftly to regain his composure.

'Apologies, Doctor Brenner, but you asked to be immediately informed of the next test'

'Ah yes, i did' he said, deadly-calm as always. 'I'll speak with the subject just before prep'

Deep beneath the facility...

A solitary figure sat in the corner of a dimly-lit room, eating one of the candies he had hidden under his mattress.

It was a rare treat, usually one he only received when he had done exceptionally well, and he was determined to enjoy every moment of it.

The thought of what happened when he failed made him shudder, and he pushed the thought aside as quickly as it had surfaced.

He wasn't going to fail again. Not ever.

Not when Papa's disappointment was so evident.

Just as he finished the last piece of chocolate, he felt someone

approaching.

It was Papa.

He quickly hid the wrappers underneath the bed, and sat back down at his chair, just as the familiar buzz and click of the electronic lock sounded.

'It's good to see you again, eleven. I trust you aren't hiding anything from me again...correct?'

He hesitated, agonizing over the prospect of lying to Papa. Nothing hurt more than seeing him upset: Not the beatings, not the denial of food, not even the shock-corrections.

At the same time, a nagging little voice inside asked what the harm was in keeping a few treats. Why didn't he deserve a reward for all the punishments?

'No, Papa' he said.

Brenner sighed, and in a move that caused the boy's heart to leap into his throat, pushed the mattress up, exposing the candy he had hoarded.

And there it was again: that guilt-inducing look of disappointment that made him feel ten times smaller than he already was.

'I thought we were friends, El'

He felt his bottom lip quiver.

'El' said the older man, as he put both hands on his shoulders. 'What was the most important rule about friends again?'

A small tear spilled from his eye.

'Th-they don't lie' he said, between sniffs.

'That's right, son'

'Friends

Don't

Lie'

5. Chapter 4

'Hello? WHERE ARE YOU!? I NEED YOUR HELP!'

The being quickly returned to shared-consciousness, perturbed that it had allowed itself to disappear into its own memories again.

'What happened? Why are we hiding in the Janitor's closet?'

'You went away, idiot! And now there's a Demagorgon waiting outside!'

His host's previous concerns about their 'arrangement' immediately came back to it, and not for the first time did the entity begin to wonder just how damaging its intervention at the cave-mouth might prove:

A thought that angered it greatly.

It was 'its' fault that Will had nearly died in the first place, after all.

'Well?' thought Will, impatiently 'what are you going to do?! I can't fight! I can't even see the door now!'

'Then maybe next time you shouldn't lock us in a PITCH DARK ROOM!'

'Oh really? It's my fault that you stopped giving me directions?! Screw yo-'

An unnatural screech interrupted their lovers-quarrel, and the door began disappearing into splinters as the creature clawed and bashed it from the other side.

'Remember what i said earlier, about mastering your fear?'

Will nodded. 'Yeah, i remember'

'Now's your chance. Get ready'

'What? No! i-'

'Stop being a bitch and FIGHT FOR YOUR FUCKING LIFE! When are you going to stand up for yourself?!"

As the door began to collapse inward, something began to change within him, slowly, at first, then rapidly, and he realized that for the first time since he had been sucked into this nightmare world, he no longer felt afraid.

He felt angry.

As the closet door came tumbling down, the youth grabbed a box cutter from one of the metal shelves, and extended the blade as far as it would go.

'I'm not afraid of you anymore!' he yelled at the hissing humanoid monstrosity.

The creature roared, and opened its four razor-lined mandibles as it lunged through the air towards its next victim.

Suddenly, time seemed to slow itself, and the monster's progression towards him seemed to reduce itself to a crawl.

'NOW!' barked the entity.

Seizing the opportunity, Will ducked beneath the creature's outstretched claws and open mouth, and proceeded to dig the box cutter into its surprisingly soft underbelly, allowing its own momentum to slice it open.

With an ear-piercing screech of pain, it collided with the shelf, which immediately crashed down on top of it, permanently ending its vile existence.

Overcome with a zealous rage, the boy began repeatedly stabbing the creature's exposed remains, hatred filling every corner of his psyche.

'DIE!'

'DIE!'

They yelled in unison, Will's simple triumph over his own fear being

amplified many times over by the entity's rage, born of painful, mind-shattering memories of torture and abuse that had lasted for years and years.

When his host became too exhausted to continue, the being suddenly snapped out of its own blood-red reverie, and realized that it had lost control of itself...again.

Will began to visibly shaking as the testosterone subsided, and the entity quickly intervened.

'You need to sleep, Will. I'll take over for now'

Too exhausted to argue, Will relinquished control of his mind and body, and allowed himself to drift away, deep into his subconscious...

His body collapsed onto the floor, sticky with the creature's viscous, yellow blood, and lay there for a full minute before its eyes fluttered open once again.

Slowly lifting standing itself up, the entity looked in amazement at its own hands.

It had been so long since it had inhabited a body, it had forgotten what even such a basic thing as having hands was like.

As the faux-Will slowly became adjusted to walking and moving his arms, he remembered some of the old mental exercises that Papa's men had taught him. Somewhat-clumsily dropping into a meditative position, he began an exercise that emphasized on strengthening ones focus and resolve.

Thirty minutes later, he re-opened his eyes, and stood. The next course of action was clear, and while his host's strength had returned, he knew he had to hurry while there was still something left of Will to save: a side-effect of the psychic energy he had been sustaining him with ever since he had first brought him back from the brink of death.

'Breath and Focus: mind over matter'. He repeated this mantra several times, and began making his way to the emergency stair-well, which lead to the basement, and the hopefully-still functioning backup

generator.

6. Chapter 5

At first, Will's dreams were filled with pleasant memories of home.

Memories of hours-long D&D campaigns, and that one time when Dustin spilled koolaid all over his game board.

Memories of rocking out with Johnathan on the way to school.

Memories of home, and Mom's killer oatmeal raisin cookies.

But just as quickly as those good memories arrived, they left, and became replaced with images of himself viciously stabbing the Demano, the monster, over and over and over again.

The thought created a savage, almost animal-like glee within him: a feeling of power and control that he had never experienced in his life, and this caused him to laugh and shout triumphantly, like in the Conan the Barbarian movie Johnathan had secretly taken him to see last year.

Like a warrior.

Like a killer.

The last thought hit him like a ton of bricks, and the feeling of savage gratification quickly disappeared: replaced by another, terrifying thought:

'What am i turning into?'

The blessed, comforting darkness of subconscious sleep suddenly disappeared, and was supplanted by a floating sensation, as if he were submerged in water.

As if on que, he found himself doing that exact thing: floating, but not in a pool or in the ocean.

He was inside a giant tank of some sort, almost like something you'd see at Sea world (the one time he had been allowed to go with Dustin and his family), except this was was made for people, and he was

wearing an oxygen mask.

How he instinctively knew that it was made for people both puzzled, and disturbed him.

There was a plexiglass viewing window that took up roughly half the tank in front of him, and to his surprise, there was a man standing just outside in a Tan-colored business suit, smiling.

His hair was noticeable graying, and there was something decidedly disingenuous about that smile, like a snake that was about to strike...

But he none of that mattered: he was going to make Papa proud of him.

Wait, what?

Who was this? And 'where' was this...?

The older man bent down, and came back up with a dry-erase board that simply read:

'REMEMBER YOUR MISSION'

Then he quickly erased it, wrote something new, and held it up once more:

'REMEMBER YOUR TRAINING'

'Yes, Papa' he thought, and that eerie sense of being in someone else's memories pervaded his mind.

The man gave a final nod of encouragement, and signaled to someone out of view.

A metal panel suddenly slid over the window, sealing him in pitch darkness.

Just as he was about to panic, the one whose eyes he was looking through closed them, and the world around him dissolved.

He was standing in a shallow, black sea of tepid, un-moving water.

And once again, he somehow just 'knew' that it was a place between worlds...

And that he was here to kill someone.

After his fight with the monster, the thought wasn't quite as terrible as it previously would have been...but then again, that was an in-human beast, not a flesh and blood person...

But no matter: Papa wanted the man dead, and that was all the reason he needed.

And that was when Will finally, and horribly came to understand exactly whose memory this was.

A shimmery form appeared in the distance, and he felt himself involuntarily move towards it.

As he got closer, the form began to stabilize itself into the shape of a Black-uniformed man.

Strangely, he was speaking in a language that couldn't be mistaken for anything but German. Will had watched too many old WWII movies with Johnathan to not recognize its unique cadence.

Then he recognized the Swastika arm-band, and confusion set in.

'Was that what you were trained to do?' he asked the entity 'Kill Nazis with your mind?'

Images of another man in a similar uniform manifested in the form of thoughts. He was sitting at an ornate desk, signing some sort of official papers when he suddenly clutched at his chest, an expression of pure agony on his weathered face as his heart exploded.

Another image was that of a beautiful Woman, taking a stroll in town. She began rubbing her temples, thinking she had a terrible headache. But her short-scream confirmed that it was an aneurysm.

Three more unwitting victims of psychic assassination were shown to him, and Will began to understand just why the entity acted the way it did:

It wasn't sane.

It was a survivor, yes, and a dangerous fighter, but it wasn't sane.

More images appeared, but this time of a boy his age and height being beaten with night-sticks by men in security uniforms who obviously weren't German. He covered his face and hands in a futile attempt to shield himself, and the beating seemed to go on forever, until the same, older man in the business suit stepped into the room, and calmly told the attackers to stop.

After they had filed out of the room, little-different from their Nazi counterparts, the man squatted down beside the boy.

'Do you know why you were punished, eleven?'

Slowly, he sat up, wincing with pain, and moistening his patient gown with tears.

'I f-failed, Papa' he cried, and burst into a flood of tears.

The not-so-good Doctor embraced him in a deceptively sympathetic hug, and held him until he had cried himself out.

'Shh, shhh...'

'I'm sorry! I don't know wha-what happened! Please don't make me like the other ten! Please!'

'Shhhhhh...' said the man. 'Not today'

'I need you to tell me what you saw, El. What was it that frightened you?'

Looking up with his tear-streaked face, Will suddenly grew very cold and clammy at what he saw.

The boy looked exactly like him.

Same height.

Same build.

Same facial features.

Same eye color.

The only difference was in his shaved head.

'M-...monster' he said, voice quivering'

Then, just as suddenly as he had left, he was back in the initial memory, still standing before the image of the National Socialist party member.

Still ready to end his life.

Just as he began to concentrate, however, a strange, all-too familiar chittering sound arose off in the distance behind him, and the image of the man vanished like smoke'

'No!' came the immediate thought that wasn't truly his.

Turning around to face the thing, he began slowly, and cautiously making his way towards it, much to Will's horror.

But how could he warn a shadow of the past of the danger he was in?

Out of nowhere, the vision shifted, and the boy whose eyes he was helplessly looking through was no longer sneaking, but running full blast towards the monster.

Jerking around at the 'scent' or rather feeling of the unfamiliar presence, the creature roared.

Will felt his right hand thrust outward, and began closing his fist.

To Will's shock, the creature stopped, and the sound of snapping and breaking bones became sickeningly audible.

The dream faded, and he was back in the familiar, comforting darkness of his own subconscious.

Except it was no longer comforting now.

'That was what i should have done' said the entity, remorsefully. 'It

was just a projection that couldn't hurt a fly, but i didn't- i didn't react the way i should...'

Its voice trailed off, and once more, Will felt sadness for the tortured being, who had been just like him, once. Only he had had no loving parent to care for him, no good older Brother to understand him.

Instead, he had been raised by a Government-sanctioned Psychopath and his thugs, who had taught him the meaning of suffering and hate, who had answered his tears and terrors with beatings, starvation, and cruel, feigned sympathy immediately afterwards.

'Eleven?'

He felt its anger flare at the mention of the name.

'What did you call me?'

Gathering his courage, Will knew that asking the wrong questions could enrage the being he now shared his mind and body with, but he had to know the truth.

'In that memory, the one where the guards were...'

A torrent of emotions emanated from eleven: hurt, fear, anger, pain, and finally rage...rage at how he had been emotionally manipulated for over a decade, at the men who had beaten and abused him, and most of all, rage at the man he had called 'Papa', who had never felt an ounce of the sympathy he had feigned for all those years, who had never truly cared if he lived or died at all.

'I have to know!' he said, and pressed on, despite the danger. 'Why did you look and sound like me in 'your' memory? What are you hiding!?'

Silence.

'Who are you?! Why are you helping me?!'

A long pause ensued: a deathly quiet that often proceeds a devastating revelation.

Then, finally, it spoke, and in that moment Will knew that, even after the horror of being trapped in a world of living nightmares, coming terrifyingly close to death, and temporarily losing his sanity in a rage-fueled frenzy, the being's next words ensured that nothing would ever be the same for him again.

7. Chapter 6

'I'm your friend, Will. But there's more to it than that...a lot more'

A new emotion, one that he hadn't directly felt from the entity- from Eleven before, radiated from it intensely.

Fear.

'I've been lying to you, and friends aren't supposed to lie. I just...i don't know what will happen if...'

Finally, his frustration reached its zenith.

'Stop it!'

It recoiled in confusion.

'What?'

'Stop dancing around the truth! Just tell me!'

'I don't want to hurt you!'

'YOU'RE A LIAR! JUST LIKE PAPA!'

The shock of hearing these words broke El's concentration, and the increasingly aggressive Will seized the opportunity to extract the entity's thoughts by force...

Flashes of memory once again flooded his mind, and he now found himself looking through Eleven's eyes once again.

This time, he was sneaking, and the price of being caught was death, but he just had to know.

He had spied on Papa's mind, something he knew he shouldn't have done, but what he had found in his memories wouldn't leave him alone, like an itch he couldn't scratch.

He had to know.

The file he was looking for was in Papa's office, and the thought of Papa finding him there, where he had been told never to go was terrifying...But he had to know.

Had to know who the Woman in the picture was.

The Woman who looked looked so much like him, only older.

Avoiding the guards wasn't easy: they patrolled in a way that ensured that they were almost always watching the same direction.

'Almost' always.

There was a brief moment when the two he was hiding from would turn away from each other, and that was the moment Eleven chose to strike.

After years of honing his abilities on the test animals Papa's men continuously brought in, snapping two men's necks was no challenge.

Hiding the bodies, however, was.

Moving quickly, the psychic assassin telekinetically unlocked the Janitor's closet, and hurriedly shoved the bodies inside: an action which 'did' result in a noticeable drain on his energy.

He had to be careful not to exhaust himself.

Rounding the corner, the boy's heart leapt into his throat:

Papa as standing not two feet away from him in conversation with his back turned.

With nowhere else to hide, Eleven quickly made his way back to the supply closet, and hid with the bodies, reaching out with his mind to see if Papa and the Scientist were still there.

After what felt like an eternity, the two men ended their conversation and went their separate ways, with Papa walking towards the elevator.

Breathing a sigh of relief, the boy exited the supply closet, and made

his way back towards Papa's office.

Luckily, the hall was empty when he reached the door, but the sound of voices warned him to hurry.

Papa didn't know it, but his prized 'subject No. 11' had been practicing electronic lock-manipulation for some time now, and no door could stop him.

Once inside, he quickly shut the door, and went swiftly over to the file-cabinet, knowing exactly which door held the file he wanted...just not 'which' file, exactly.

An agonizing five minutes later, he had found it!

Smiling at his little victory, Eleven opened it up, and scanned the profile within.

'Byers, Joyce' it read.

'Born: January 2nd, 1944. Participant in psychotropic narcotics study (test case 81), [Redacted]'

Why was Papa so interested in this file?

Reading even more closely, he saw something that caught his eye.

'Died March 22nd, 1971. Cause: excessive blood loss due to complications in child-birth. Survived by [Redacted. Please reference file '011' for further details]'

File 011? All of the files were arranged alphabetically, not numerically. Where would the numerical files be...?

Then it dawned on him.

Papa's desk.

Getting a standard desk door lock open was easier than tampering with an electronic lock, but it still took a few seconds before he heard an audible click.

There were eleven files in total, and as he quickly glanced through each one, he felt a lump in his throat.

These files were records of all previous test subjects: each and every one a failure in some way or another...save for one.

Subject No. 11.

Opening the last file with wide eyes and shaking hands, he began reading.

'Subject No. 11. Born March 22nd, 1971. Father: [Redacted]. Mother: Byers, Joyce. Birth name:

Byers, William'

The memory shattered into a million pieces, and Will began to disappear.

8. Chapter 6 interlude

A thousand, thousand faces flew past: some friends, others tormentors.

A thousand, thousand events, pleasant and horrible alike, took root in his mind.

Standing amidst the whirlwind, the torrent of madness, a soul, lost and alone, screamed in frustration and anguish: wrent asunder by two identities vying for ownership, for purchase of his psyche.

His name was William Byers: Born to a single Mother in Hawkins Indiana, kid brother to Johnathan Byers, and best friends with Mike Wheeler

His name was also William Byers: Murderer of his own Mother at birth, Government-sanctioned killer, and test subject 011.

He had excellent grades at School.

He had killed over twenty people with his mind alone.

He lived for D&D.

It was ALL true! All of it! It had ALL happened!

And yet, a part of him recognized that one truth had to win out over the other: had to be 'the' truth.

But...which one?

Which truth was the real truth?

...

Who was he?

A wave of despair and hopelessness threatened to overwhelm and crush this soul, this tiny pin-prick of existence:

It was too much.

He was a candle about to be snuffed.

He was a flame on the verge of being extinguished.

The only thing left to do was what he had done from the beginning:
hide.

And so this soul, this entity, fled into the deep, yawning darkness of
the subconscious...perhaps never to be seen again.

9. Chapter 7

'NO, STOP! You don't understand- WILL!'

The sudden turmoil within his host's mind caused El to double over in pain, just barely stopping his counterpart's body from falling down the crumbling stair-well.

'WILL! WILL!'

No response, save for a brief scream that ended almost as soon as it had begun.

A scream that came from within.

Delving recklessly into a mind that wasn't his, El reached out to grasp his twin's consciousness in an effort to save him...

...and failed.

Just as he started to pull Will back from the brink, he did the unthinkable...

and leapt over the mind's equivalent of the cliff's edge.

'WILL! NO!'

And in a sudden, terrible moment, Will Byers was gone.

Even as El stood in shock, bewildered at what had just transpired, the realization that Will's empathy had slowly but surely been supplanting his rage made the pain even worse...

...Especially knowing that his rage had been slowly supplanting Will's empathy.

El had failed.

Again.

From the moment Will had been pulled into this rotting prison that

had once been his world, El had sensed his presence, like a beacon of light in the darkness, and he had hurried to it like a drowning man swimming towards a life-raft.

Finally, he had been given a chance to atone for what had had caused.

Finally, he could right the world-shattering wrong that had had done.

But when he had found the spawn-mother's intended prey, and analyzed the boy's mind, he had recoiled in shock when he discovered who he was.

It was him.

Somehow, by fate or chance, somehow he was face to face with a mirror-image of himself from another world. A reflection that was everything he had never been allowed to be: free, innocent, happy...loved.

And now, that pure, un-tainted reflection was gone: swallowed whole by El's own inner darkness: his all-consuming, hate-fueled rage. Corrupted and destroyed by the very thing that was meant to protect him:

Their Psychic bond.

Looking down at 'his' hands as if they were covered in blood, Eleven, the Dark reflection of Will Byers in this world, let loose a psychic scream of his own, no longer caring about the monstrous attention he was drawing to himself.

Windows shattered.

Walls shook.

And every twisted perversion of life within five miles, spore carriers and spawns alike (what Will had called 'Demagorgons'), as well as many other creatures, fled in abject terror and pain at the wailing anguish that was killing them.

Most simply died, bodies exploding into showers of blood and gore.

The vile, fungal-like tentacle growths along the walls and ceilings began to fall and wither.

Everything around him was dying again, and in the end, he sat on his knees, staring into empty space, no longer caring about anything.

He was a murderer, a destroyer of worlds, and now, he had murdered the closest thing to a friend he would ever have.

No: far, far more than a friend:

He had murdered his own Brother.

10. Chapter 7 interlude

Hundreds of voices had screamed for their Mother at once before falling silent.

Her psychic-nodes had suddenly vanished, leaving her completely blind to an area of immense importance: the place where she had first entered into this world.

But worst of all, the world-gate that sustained her existence, had been damaged: Her sudden, noticeably weakened state serving as undeniable proof.

Fear was not something the Mother was familiar with. Yes, the pitifully weak creatures, the 'Humans' that she and her children had taken this world from had come close to killing her once, and would have succeeded, had it not been for her spy.

But now, with potential danger so close to what was essentially her heart, a sense of panic began to well up within, and the Lovecraftian horror roared in anger: commanding a great number of her children to descend upon the place of her birth in this dimension.

With her own safety assured, the towering monstrosity returned its attention to the next world, the one that the human female had opened the way to by accident, by mere...chance.

But of course, no such concept existed. All things followed patterns.

Especially things that were dimensionally related: inexplicably mirroring one-another through the vastness of time and space. A vastness that the Mother knew well.

Peering past the gate into the un-harvested 'Earth': the lone reflection of what this world- her world -had once been, she gave the order for her children there to begin hunting.

Her presence there beneath the ground needed to be fed in order to grow.

11. Chapter 8

A single, tiny facet of existence walked through tepid water, surrounded by a great, black void, feeling itself being drawn inexorably towards...something.

Something that this consciousness, this 'soul', could not quite understand, but nevertheless sensed was a part of it: as if they were both, somehow, two halves of a whole that had been split.

Then it came into view: the shimmery form of a young boy wearing a hospital gown and a shaved head: angry, powerful...and in pain.

I didn't mean to kill you! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Why can't i just die, Papa? Why can't i just-

The feelings of self-loathing and guilt were almost overwhelming, but as strong as they were, the aimless consciousness sensed that they were nothing more than a symptom of an underlying turmoil: a kind of insanity born out of deliberately induced trauma, both physical and mental.

Papa...

Something about that name struck a cord within it. He had heard it before, but he couldn't say where.

He had to go back! Had to return to...something. Somewhere.

He put his head in his hands in frustration, unhelpfully abstract recollections of 'things' suddenly flying through his thoughts, almost-

Wait.

'His' hands.

'His' head.

A feeling of relief washed over him. The simple concept of having something approaching an identity gave him a sense of stability and self-confidence that he had previously lacked.

Okay, so 'he' was absolutely a he. Good.

But there had to be more to it than that. He couldn't just be 'he' or 'him'. He had to have his name back...

Back?

An elated smile crept over his face: he had a name!

But...what was it?

More frustration. He knew he was a person, a living, breathing human being, but the hazy scraps of memory just wouldn't come together!

He felt as if his very identity had been scattered like a jigsaw puzzle, and was only now just starting to be put back together.

Maybe, just maybe this other boy knew something about him.

'Other' boy.

Another piece of the puzzle clicked into place, and another piece of his identity was restored.

And then he remembered: they were around the same age- no, they 'were' the same age!

Then things began to pick up speed.

They had the same eyes

The same height

The same build

The same, overall mannerism...

...The same name.

As the youth's identity returned, the maddening whirlwind that had destroyed him before threatened to return as well, but now...

Now things were different.

'He' was different.

His weak, coddled mind hadn't been able to handle the truth before, but now, after having had his very identity torn apart and reassembled, he was stronger.

Now, he was ready to face the truth like a man, and not like the scared boy he had been.

With his newfound confidence, he faced the tornado of confusion and despair, and reached out with his hand, gritting his teeth in concentration.

'GO...AWAY!'

Its resistance was strong, but its one-time victim had discovered its fatal weakness:

He no longer believed in its strength.

Growling in anger at what this storm of insanity had caused last time around, he poured every ounce of himself into un-making it, and slowly, very slowly, it began to lose power.

Suddenly, another, unmistakable presence added its own, devastating strength to the fight.

Nodding in gratitude to El, the two fought the storm to a standstill, until finally, after what seemed like an eternity, it winked out of existence, and his mind began to calm.

He laughed. 'His'? He had a name, and it was -

'WILL!'

He barely had time to react before his uncharacteristically ecstatic twin embraced him in a hug that may not have been real, but was undeniably sincere.

As they both cried tears of joy at being reunited, Will Byers knew

that, even if he never made back to his world, he was home.

12. Chapter 9

The moment Will took back control of his body from El, he knew something was different.

Almost all traces of the rot and decay that had infested the facility were gone, save for the withered remains of the black tentacles that had lined the walls, and a few Demagorgon bodies at the bottom of the stair-well that looked like they had literally exploded.

'What happened here?'

His otherworldy twin remained silent for a time, before responding in a small voice:

I thought you were dead' said Eleven

A strange (well, 'stranger') thing seemed to have taken place during Will's absence. El, who had been hyper-aggressive and bloodthirsty since their first meeting, seemed to have calmed down considerably, while Will, who no longer felt or behaved like a weak and terrified Mama's boy, also no longer felt the presence of the animal-like rage that had been steadily taking over his mind.

El's theory was that, sometime during Will's absence, some sort of psychic/psychological rebalancing had taken place between them.

What exactly that entailed was beyond Will, but as best as he could figure, both of their minds had 'shared' (in a forced, borderline parasitic/symbiotic sort of way) each of the boy's personalities with the other until the two eventually balanced each other out.

The implications of which Will found disturbing, for more reasons than one.

'You killed them all...at once?'

They had made it to the bottom of the stairs now, and as luck would have it, the big metal door was slightly ajar.

'Yes' said El, a sudden fire in his voice. *'And i would do it again'*

Will grinned, having grown accustomed to his Brother's killer-nature.

'I'm glad you're back, Will'

He shrugged. 'I couldn't let you have 'all' the fun. Besides: who's gonna keep you out of trouble if i'm gone?'

His twin laughed: a rare occurence that wouldn't be quite so rare now, Will hoped.

'But yeah' he said, breathing in the now (relatively) fresh air. 'It's good to be back'

The basement was pitch black, so much so that Will couldn't even see his hand in front of his face.

'What are we supposed to do now? I don't even have a damn flashlight!'

'I can solve that problem' said El, smugly, and he began to concentrate.

Suddenly, Will could see, as if through a pale blue night vision lens.

'We need to hurry now. I don't have much energy left'

'How 'do' you get your spell-energy back?'

El groaned.

'It's not 'spell energy', dope: it's electrovores psychic power. The other ten had to eat a ton of food and sleep for a long time after they drained themselves, but all i need is an electrical source'

'Go down the hall and turn right, by the way'

'Okay, Mr. sensitive' he said, making his way down the corridor, past shattered office doors and open air ducts.

'Umm, El?'

'Yes?'

'Mind telling me who the 'other ten' were?'

'They were the failures. Papa killed a few of them himself, before i came along. He called them his 'greatest disappointments'

'Doesn't matter, though: They died, I lived, and my name is Eleven for a reason, dumbshit'

Not for the first time did Will consider his counterpart's unstable personality. It was obvious that it would take a lot more than psychic personality therapy to bring El to full sanity.

'I don't 'need' help: i need you to hurry the hell up and get to the generator'

Will sighed. Having his every thought read by a psycho-killer was getting old, fast.

'I heard that, asshole!'

13. Chapter 10

The huge, corroded generator dominated much of the empty space in the room, while the rest was occupied by secondary-breaker stations, and now useless, broken computers.

Decaying relics of a dead humanity.

The thought that the same thing could happen to his world chilled Will to the bone as he stepped over the bent and battered metal door.

'Everything seems okay here for the most part, and as far as i know, the main-breakers are still switched on. Now you just need to put your hands on the generator, and i'll do the rest'

'Alright' he said, cracking his knuckles. 'Let's do this'

'And don't move' said El. 'You'll break the connection if you do'

'Sure. Fine'

'I won't be able to speak for at least ten minutes, so-'

'Yes, Mom, i get it!'

'Okay, Mr. Sensitive' El replied, using Will's own mouth to project a mischievous grin, much to his corporeal counterpart's annoyance.

The boy sighed, and reached out to touch the side of the big machine.

'One more thing: I'll need all the juice i can get to pull this off, so you'll be in the dark until i can get the lights back on. Sorry'

'Great. I love the dark' he said, voice dripping with sarcasm.

'Here we go'

A strange sensation of being drained became readily apparent, and Will had to concentrate in order to stop his suddenly shaking legs and arms from giving out.

This wasn't going to be any fun at all.

'Dammit, El!' he thought *'Hurry up!'*

Unbeknownst to Will, his otherworldly twin had neglected to mention just how little time they truly had.

Just outside of the dilapidated, one-time Government installation, at the edge of the rotting woods that surrounded it, a flood began to descend upon the facility.

14. Chapter 11

'I'm disappointed in you, Eleven'

Papa raised the night-stick, and delivered another blow to his back.

'You had so much potential; so much promise'

The police baton connected to his side this time, causing El to wince.

'But you should never have done that, Son. You now have knowledge that weakens you: makes you vulnerable to the enemy'

'But worse still-'

He turned, and traded the club for the nearest Guard's hand gun.

'-You've failed 'me'. I have always considered your predecessors my greatest failures; but i was wrong'

Loading a round into the chamber of the 9mm, Dr. Brenner aimed the gun at El's head, and slowly began to squeeze the trigger.

"You' are. You possessed the will, the endurance, and the raw, killing power that none of your pitiful brothers and sisters shared. But even you have failed me, subject 011'

Suddenly, the gun was no longer pointing at El's head, but at the Doctor's heart instead.

As fast as they could, the security team were all drawing their side-arms...

...but not fast enough.

The sickening crack of ten necks snapping at once filled the air, and the lifeless bodies fell to the floor in unison.

'Impressive. Perhaps i was wrong about you after all, Eleve-'

The floating gun rammed itself into his stomach, causing him to

double over onto his knees.

'LIER!'

'What-' cough '-what exactly do you hope to accomplish, Son? Do you honestly think that you can ever be 'normal'? You and i both know who you are, Eleven. Don't deny it'

The gun was now pressed against his heart again.

'Yes' he said, a look of determination on his face. 'My name is Byers: William Byers'

The bullet ripped through the man's chest, and 'Papa', the demon who had owned El's every waking moment and had stolen his childhood crumpled to the floor, holding his chest, a look of agony and surprise on his normally emotionless face.

'Goodbye, Papa' said the dark reflection of Will Byers, and he began to walk away.

'Cough- n-not 'Byers"

He stopped.

'What?'

Brenner coughed again, spitting up blood...a vital fluid that he was losing fast.

'Why do you t-think-' cough '-made you c-call me Papa?'

A cold feeling began to well up inside of El, and he pointed a shaking finger at his old tormentor.

'Stop lying'

Brenner shook his head.

'Not-lying. Your last name-' cough '-isn't Byers'

'It's Brenner...Son'

El shook off the painful memory. He couldn't let himself be distracted by such things, not while he was preoccupied with something so vital, and especially not by memories he wanted to remain hidden from his better self: the bright reflection of all that he wasn't...

He had tainted Will's innocence enough.

But more than that, El was afraid:

Afraid of what Will would think of him if he knew the truth in its entirety, un-filtered by the false, heavily modified memories he had given him.

Afraid that his good-hearted Brother, a better person than he could ever be, even after the unforeseen cross-contamination of their psyches, would look on him as the monster he truly was.

No. He could never let him know what he had done; how he had deliberately opened the gate for the monsters to destroy the facility, and eat the cruel and abusive scientists alive.

He and Will would go to their graves at a ripe old age, and El would die happy, knowing that he had at least spared him the terrible truth: that he had caused the genocide of an entire world.

15. Chapter 12

'Hurry...the fuck...up, El!'

Joyce Byers would have spanked the living hell out of her youngest son if she had ever heard him use that kind of language, but Will was too tired to care.

Sweat poured down his arms and back, his head was spinning, and his throat felt like sandpaper.

It was all he could do to keep himself oriented, and the hallucinations weren't helping at all.

'My life would've been a hell of a lot better if 'you' hadn't popped out, you little shit'

The ghostly apparition of Lonnie, his using, deadbeat dad stood off to the side, arms folded.

All of the missed birthdays, all of the half-hearted attempts to make Will like what he liked, and all of the bullshit excuses for not being there came flooding back.

'I hate you'

Lonnie laughed his typically cruel, mocking laugh.

'That's it, squirt? That's all you got?'

'No' said another voice.

A fist suddenly connected with the Man's jaw, and the phantasmal Lonnie disappeared.

'Don't let him get in your head, Will' said Johnathan. *'He just wants to drag you down to his level. You're a better person than him'*

Then his tone changed.

'You're a better person than El, too'

'How am i better than him!?' said Will, disparagingly. 'I can't do anything but run and hide, and he can kill monsters!'

The Johnathan that wasn't really Johnathan shook his head.

'Being good at killing isn't a 'good' thing at all. No matter how strong he is, no matter how fast or smart or powerful he is, as a person, El will always be less than you. That's what makes you 'you', Will, and not-'

The image of Johnathan suddenly morphed itself into that of his dark twin.

'-me'

The lights (at least, the ones that weren't broken) began to flicker, and a powerful electrical charge filled the air, causing the hairs of his body to stand on end.

The dizziness was now mostly gone, but his throat still felt dry. He needed water.

'Sorry' said El, apologetically. 'I didn't plan on the whole 'you disappearing and me losing my shit' thing. Psycho-Electrovoresness alone can't sustain you for long, and the food and water here is poison. We need to get you back to your world, fast'

'El?'

'Yes?'

Will clenched his fists.

'Don't ever use my family like that again! If you want to say something, just say it, but leave my Mom, my Brother, and my best friend **out of this!**'

Somewhat taken aback, El fell silent. He was unaccustomed to such strong emotional attachments centered around other people. The only strong sentiment he had ever truly felt towards others was hate.

This feeling was new.

This 'affection' was foreign to him, and he wasn't quite sure what to make of it.

Then again, maybe that thing he had felt after helping save Will's consciousness was exactly that: affection. Extreme concern and protectiveness towards his strange sibling.

'I don't-...-'feel' things like you do, Will. Sometimes-'

Suddenly, chunks of concrete began falling from the wall.

The metal door at the top of the stairs made a loud 'bang' as it hit the far side of the stair-well, and the sounds of screeching and clawed feet became deafeningly apparent.

There had to be hundreds of them, if not a thousand or more.

'Dammit! I thought that bitch would give us more time!'

'Wait: who?' Said Will.

'These monsters don't reproduce like humans do. They have a Mother, and umm-'

The wall began to crumble.

'-she's not happy with us'

'Awesome. Maybe we can make friends with her later, Now are we going to do something, or just stand here?!"

The army of demagorgons was getting closer by the second, and the wall was almost gone.

'When do i ever 'not' have a plan? I knew she was going to do something like this, after all'

The sounds of clawed feet racing down the hallway became louder and louder.

Will felt his right hand move of its own accord back onto the generator, and he instantly knew what El was going to do.

'Ready to make some sparks?' A not so subtle hint of sadistic glee emanating from El's side of their dual-psyches.

'Hell yeah!' Will grinned, extending his left hand like the Emperor in Star Wars, ready to burn the evil creatures that had stolen him from his home, family, and friends.

A massive chorus of terrified, inhuman screams erupted from the basement, and the lights flickered and died for the second, and final time.

16. Chapter 13

A terrifying scream of rage and anguish was followed by a blast of psychic energy.

The earth shook.

Rotten trees were shattered.

And the unnatural storm that surrounded the Mother became dangerously magnified in intensity.

Something was killing her children.

Something powerful.

The towering monstrosity, the Lovecraftian Elder-God, stared with murderous hatred towards the direction of the old human installation.

Now, she would deal with this matter herself.

Now, the power that had defied and tormented her would be ripped apart at an atomic level, very, very slowly.

Death was coming...

And it would have its due.

The stench of scorched, ab-human flesh made Will gag.

A veritable mountain of dead creatures stretched from the far-away stairwell, to the once-festered tunnel behind the collapsed wall, now cleansed of unnatural life.

Staring down at the bodies of the vile, flesh-eating monsters, Will suddenly came to the realization that the previous emotions he had experienced, namely, the sadistic giddiness that he had felt when killing before, had fled.

Instead, a wave of nausea overcame him, and he fell to his hands and knees, just in time to avoid throwing up on himself.

'It's okay, Will. It's okay...'

Despite El's attempts to console him and convey sympathy, the 'other' Will Byers felt an overwhelming sense of relief and happiness at what was transpiring.

His twin-Brother, who he had inadvertently almost destroyed, had fully regained himself with the return of his conscience.

'E-El?' Said Will, in a small, quivering voice.

'I'm here'

'I...I d-don't want to be here anymore. Can we...can we go home now?'

His dark sibling felt a sudden, pang of guilt at all he had put Will, the 'true' Will through.

He had driven him to near-death by exhaustion out of selfish fear.

He had very nearly torn his very identity to shreds out of selfish rage.

He had lead him to the heart of a walking nightmare out of selfish need.

No matter El's intentions,

no matter his motivations,

it had all, ultimately been done out of selfishness.

After all he had done, all the pain and death he had caused, all the misery he had sown, El came to a realization of his own:

He had never hated himself more than he did now.

'Please?'

He truly was a monster.

A monster who, whether by divine, cosmological, or fateful decree, was being given a chance he didn't deserve.

A chance at redemption.

'Yeah' he replied, the collective tears of two, lost souls flowing freely.

A chance that he doubted anyone, anywhere, had ever been given before: to serve as guardian for his better self.

'Let's go home'

17. Chapter 14

Will was resting now.

He had retreated back into his own subconscious to sleep after crying himself out, and as much as El had wanted to follow suit, he couldn't very well leave his body- their body -unprotected.

Not while said body was slowly dying of thirst.

And not while they were under threat of retaliation from...her.

El pushed himself up off the floor, and got to 'his' feet.

It was time to leave.

Will's consciousness could sleep, but it had been too long since his physical form had been allowed any rest, and the constant stress was beginning to take its toll.

There was no question: he had to get Will to safety, 'now'.

Trying not to trip as he stepped over the long row of bodies, El glanced back in the one direction he didn't want to think about:

Back towards his old room, and just a little past, the chamber where he had first opened the malevolent gate.

He shook his head, and began quickly making his way back to the stair-well.

He had committed atrocities, and one day, he would atone for them.

But not today.

As he reached the top of the stairs, he expected to find more of the disgusting creatures he had tortured and toyed with for so long, but to his surprise, the hallway was clear.

'There's no fucking way she won't try to get revenge' he said to no one in particular, as he made his way to the entrance.

Thump

A brief tremor shook the ground, and an already-damaged light fixture fell to the floor with a crash.

El felt a sinking feeling in the pit of Will's stomach.

That feeling one gets just before the plunge.

Thump

This one was closer.

'You slut!' El growled. 'You just HAD to do it your fucking self, didn't you?!'

He was at the main door now, he just needed to make it back to the place where it had all started. A place that brought back even more painful memories that he had kept hidden from Will.

He had to get back to Jane's house.

THUMP

El was running. It tortured him to put his twin's body through even more life-threatening stress, but the thought of being caught by the Mother terrified him.

Almost as much as the time she 'had' caught him.

Then he felt her: that vast, terrifying, and all-too familiar alien presence at the back of his mind; clawing, screeching...searching.

As a disembodied 'soul', life-energy, whatever, El had been able to evade her psychic probes with ease. The powerful, psycho-electric storm that constantly surrounded her had been his nourishment, and he had played an amusingly enraging game of 'hide and kill your children' with her for decades.

But now, there was no chance of evading her.

No matter how much of his energy he utilized, no matter how hard

he concentrated, he simply could not mask the human body's own, bio-electric field from the Mother, or her sickening spawn.

A lesson he had learned the hard way, in what felt like a lifetime ago.

THUMP

A titanic, vaguely-insectoid form appeared over the corrupted treeline, smashing rotten trees, and shaking the infected earth with its every, five-limbed step.

An angry roar filled the air, and El redoubled his pace, hoping against hope that she would focus on the facility, and would thereby miss the fleeing human.

He could see the stick fort now. Memories of hiding there every day, waiting for Jane to come home from school, came flooding back.

Another life he had destroyed.

The one life he would have given his own for back then.

The wind suddenly picked up, and he glanced back in time to see one of her psychic tornado's level the facility.

The pull was so strong, he had to lean forward and dig in, just to avoid being knocked down. He didn't dare use his abilities now, as to her senses, they would light him up like a Christmas tree.

As quickly as it had started, the wind died, and the Mother roared in anger again, enraged that the thing that had slaughtered so many of her spawn had escaped her.

'Will!'

What?! Voices?!

How could there be other people here, unless...

'Will Byers!'

...unless they were from the other World.

That they were calling Will's name was a good sign...perhaps.

He certainly couldn't afford to linger, but even with an other-dimensional monster on his heels, he wasn't about to throw caution to the wind either.

For all he knew, these people were no different from Papa.

'Will! Where are you?!"

Spotting the bobbing of their flashlights, El stepped slowly into view, ready to access his power at a moment's notice, despite the grave consequences of doing so.

'Who are you?!" he called back.

'Oh my God, Will?! Will!'

It was a middle-aged Woman, followed closely by a man who was presumably around the same age.

El was about to react violently when he saw the Government-issued enviro suits they were wearing, but he quickly stopped himself.

Their mannerisms didn't suggest that they were military, or that they possessed any sort of professionalism at all.

In fact, the Woman seemed far less like a cold, clinical lab-person than she did a desperate Mother.

His assessment was confirmed when she grabbed him in a tight, smothering hug, and proceeded to weep tears of obvious relief.

A lump formed in his throat when he realized that this must be Will's Mother...Joyce Byers.

The Joyce Byers who hadn't died horribly in child-birth; who lived an average life with her two sons, just trying to make ends meet.

El envied them.

'Will? Are you okay? Are you hurt?' asked the man.

He turned to him and nodded.

'Yeah, we're fine. But we need to leave'

The man gave him an odd look, and El suddenly realized that he had said 'we', and not 'i'.

'Of course, baby! We're going home!' Luckily, Joyce was so happy to have her son back that she had completely missed the slip-up.

'Kid's right, Joyce: we need to get out of here before any of those damn things show up'

'How?' said Joyce. 'Those portals keep opening and closing, and we don't even know where to look!'

'We'll just keep looking around 'til we run across one-

'No' said El, squirming out of Will's Mother's embrace. 'This way'

'Wait-Will!'

He took off in the direction of Jane's house- Will's house in his world, and motioned for them to follow him.

'Son of a- fine, just don't get too far ahead of us!'

The portals seemed to be most active around that area for some reason, and it would be perfect if they could get through to Will's house from Jane's.

But of course, that would have been far too easy.

Thump

THUMP

THUMP

She had spotted them.

'RUN!' El shouted.

18. Chapter 15

'Ugh! What is 'that'?!'

The two girls rode up next to Jane, looking for trouble again.

The often mocked and abused loner tried not to acknowledge them.

'She looks like a psycho. Hey freak! Are you psycho?'

Jane gritted her teeth.

'Hey! We're talking to you! Don't be such a stuck up little bitch!'

The older girl to her left suddenly swerved her blue bike in her path.

'Leave me alone!'

The two girls laughed.

'Uh oh!' said the older one's partner in crime. 'Looks like little miss perfect is pissed!'

Before she could react, the older one grabbed a large book out of her backpack pocket.

'Give it back!' she yelled.

'Oh my God!' laughed the trouble maker. 'What a fucking loser!'

'A fucking dictionary?!' said the other one. 'No wonder you don't have any friends, freak. You probably stalk guys, don't y-'

Suddenly, the girls flew off their bikes, as if thrown by an invisible hand.

'What the hell-' the older girl tried to stand, but was thrown back down to the ground once more.

Out of the woods strode El, murder in his eyes.

'No, El! Don't!'

Her voice was a distant, illegible sound. They had hurt her, the only person in the world who had treated him with kindness, with human decency, and now, they were going to pay with their lives.

'EL, STOP!'

Reaching out with both hands, the hate-filled telepath began closing them into fists, causing the two to scream as their bones began breaking.

Suddenly, he felt warm lips press against his own, and like a snuffed candle, his uncontrollable rage was extinguished.

'Jane?' he said, new and confusing emotions having temporarily usurped his anger.

The girl had tears in her eyes, and as she held his face with her hands, she said something that would stay with him forever.

'Please, El: Please don't kill anymore people. Please!

i love you'

She kissed him again, and all seemed right with the world...

'Wha-what is that?!" Joyce yelled in panic.

'Holy mother of God!' the man exclaimed.

The Mother towered over them all like a being out of myth, a Greek Titan, ready to grind the three, pathetic mortals into dust with its immeasurable might.

They were out of time.

The monstrosity had no eyes to speak of, but something in El instinctively knew:

She was staring at him.

At that moment, El knew he had less than a second to make a snap-

decision before death-incarnate reaped its bloody harvest.

Her attacks were deadly and destructive.

He had witnessed first-hand just how horrifyingly efficient she could be.

Entire cities had fallen in mere hours beneath the combined onslaught of her and her demonic spawn, and nations followed within a few months, becoming rotten, fetid staging grounds for her unending assault on a helpless world.

A cold-burning anger began to build up inside him.

This was not the blind, animal rage that had consumed him for so long.

Nor was it the sadistic, killer-nature that prolonged contact with Will had dialed down significantly.

No, this anger was fueled by a singular memory: one of Jane lying on a Hospital bed, her mind being stolen from her one piece at a time by the same, horrible creature that stood before him now.

'One day' he said, voice trembling. 'One day, i'll kill you'

Joyce, who had grabbed him in a protective hug, looked at her son in shock.

The man simply stared at the Eldritch horror, his eye twitching, hands holding his shotgun in a vice-like grip.

The monster roared once again, and Joyce began to cry.

'No' said El. 'Not today'

Before Will's Mother or her guardian could react, he had grabbed both of their wrists.

'Get off me, dammit!'

'Don't let go' he said, and he began charging his power for the most

outlandish move he had ever done.

'What?! Will, what are you- AHHHHHHH!'

Suddenly, they were flying through the spore-clouded air, towards the House, and the portal that regularly opened within.

A bolt of red lightning came uncomfortably close to the trio, and only El's psychic senses had prevented them from being blasted into ash.

More bolts were thrown at them, and at greater frequency. El was finding harder and harder to dodge them, especially with a grown Woman struggling and screaming, and a grown Man threatening to kick his ass if he dropped him.

The house finally came into view, and El dropped down towards it like a stone, causing Joyce to scream again, and her companion to double up on his swearing.

Another bolt missed them by mere inches, causing the skin of all three to blister painfully from the intense heat, and exploded on the ground in a brief, deadly mushroom of red energy that normal lightning could never do.

'We're almost there!' he yelled. 'As soon as we land, run for the house!'

The ground was coming up fast, but he didn't dare slow down too soon, lest the Mother's psychic discharges kill them all before they even had a chance to escape.

'OH MY GOD, WE'RE GONNA DI-'

'No! We're going to live. Get ready!'

Just as the earth seemed ready to swallow them, their downward velocity suddenly slowed to a crawl, and their feet gently touched the vile ground.

Joyce was beside herself, and the Man with her stared at El with a look that fell somewhere between angry and bewildered.

'What the hell are you?' he said quietly.

'NO TIME! RUN!'

A mad dash ensued, and El risked a glance back in the direction they had barely escaped from

The Mother was tearing towards them, her psychic storm having dramatically increased in intensity as it reflected her mood.

The Man kicked the door open, and all three rushed inside.

'This way, quick!' El yelled.

Seeing what the rot and degradation had done to Jane's house hurt him. The hallway to her Mom's room was completely sealed by a disgusting, organic black mass, and the psychic tentacle-nodes were everywhere.

And of course, the portal was in Jane's room.

A stab of emotional pain threatened to turn his- well, Will's -stomach in knots, and reminded him of his failure to protect the girl he had loved.

A piece of his soul had died with her, and not even the Brotherly affection between him and Will could restore it.

Only the Mother's death would serve as penance for his crimes.

Her room was all but destroyed.

Her D&D figurines lay scattered across the floor, the shelf they had been on was in pieces.

Her closet was filled with the same, black mass as was in the hallway, but this one was glowing and translucent.

The only thing relatively untouched by the rot and decay was Jane's bed.

He put his hand on the tattered blanket, remembering all the times

they had sat at that very spot together to read. El had absorbed the sayings of Nietzsche like a sponge, while Jane had been more disposed toward the thoughts of Pliny.

But, as always, he didn't have time to dwell in the memories of those brief, Golden days.

The wind began to pick up outside.

'Joyce! You go first'

'No!' she said adamantly, looking at her son with loving, but wary eyes. 'Will goes first!'

El growled in frustration, and thrust his hands out, using his power to push her through the portal, despite her protests.

'You've got a lot of explaining to do when we get back, ki-'

Suddenly, the roof began to peel off, and objects began flying through the air.

'GET IN, DAMMIT!' said the Man as he grabbed who he thought was Will Byers, and shoved him through the portal.

Glancing back one last time at his first love's rapidly disintegrating home, El reached out, and pulled one of the D&D figurine's to his hand, and clutched it like a drowning man would a life-raft.

The last, physical connection to Jane.

Travelling through the fleshy, organic portal was one of the most bizarre experiences EL had ever gone through, and that had to contend with dying to a 'demagorgon', and waking later, hovering over his chewed and torn corpse.

And yet, somehow, even after all the absolute horror he had witnessed, from Jane's internal murder to the death of his entire world-

-somehow, the thought of the bright, un-corrupted world that

awaited on the other side, filled with life and joy, was almost terrifying to him.

Then again, Will's first time in his world must have been equally traumatic.

As he collapsed onto the floor, covered in disgusting, amniotic-like liquid, Joyce's Mothering instincts instantly overrode the terror of the unnatural things he had done to save her, and she instantly ran to him, smothering him in another, sobbing embrace, having since discarded her Enviro suit.

A few seconds later, the gruff Man came stumbling after, and the portal began to seal itself.

'Joyce' he said, throwing his suit's head-covering onto Will's bed.
'That's the last God damn time i go through an inter-dimensional fucking portal to save your kid'

19. Chapter 16

Will awoke to the sound of electronic beeping.

His first instinct after weeks of fighting for his life was to sit up and look around wildly for the monsters.

'Will, baby? It's me' said a voice he thought he would never hear again

'Mom!' he exclaimed, and tears began to fall in rivers as he hugged her, holding onto her in fear that was a dream he might wake up from.

'It's okay, it's okay' she cooed.

When he had finished crying, Joyce handed him a tissue to wipe the tears and snot away.

A hand gripped his shoulder in a friendly, familiar way, and he looked up to see Johnathan smiling his kind, reassuring smile.

'Thank God you're back, Will' he said, trying to fight back tears of his own.

Suddenly, the door to the room burst open, and in ran the three of the best people he knew.

'Will! Are you okay?'

'Oh my God, Will, what happened, man?'

'Will! You're alive!'

Mike, Dustin and Lucas practically hovered over the hospital bed, clamoring to tell their stories of what had happened in his absence

'We thought you were dead' said Mike, lip quivering.

Will took a deep breath, happy to breath un-tainted air once more.

'I got better' he said, grinning as he quoted his favorite Monty Python: search for the Holy Grail line.

'Idiot!' said Lucas, lightly punching his shoulder. But he couldn't hide his smile.

'Told you guys' sad Dustin. 'We should've cast 'resurrect' sooner'

'Wouldn't have worked' Will grinned. 'I don't serve Mystara, remember?'

The four friends laughed, and all was right with the world again.

'Hey Will?' Said Mike. 'I want you to meet my new friend when you get better. She's the one who helped us find you'

Will nodded, curiosity immediately taking hold.

'Sure' he said. 'I'd like that'

A week and a half later, Will walked out of the Hawkins memorial Hospital with Johnathan, who had parked his car right in front.

El had been strangely quiet since he had woken up. Will had tried to pressure him into talking, but El had pushed him away.

Even still, El, as powerful as he was, couldn't hide his feelings from the one he shared his mind, his body, and his very identity with, and Will sensed that he was grieving.

But over what, he couldn't say. He just knew that he hated not being able to comfort him.

The sun was out, and only a few clouds were in the sky. Birds were merrily chirping, and a gentle breeze was blowing.

Will inhaled the fresh air as if it were gourmet chocolate.

It truly was a perfect day.

'Wanna get some ice cream?' Said Johnathan, snapping him back into

reality.

'Yeah. That would be great'

Climbing in and buckling up, Johnathan started up the engine, and Tom Petty's 'Refugee' began playing on the radio.

He was alive. And against all odds, he was home.

And maybe, Just maybe, El would begin to heal.

20. Epilogue

Giant, white spores floated through the toxic air.

Unnatural bolts of crimson lightning illuminated the black sky, exposing the infested, crumbling ruins of the former, dominant species of the planet.

The Mother screamed in rage, and the psychic shock-wave toppled buildings, and threw dilapidated cars.

The monster that had murdered her children, and almost cut her off from her dimensional life-line, had escaped into the other world.

Still, even as she wreaked havoc on an already ruined world, she knew her vengeance would soon be complete.

The reflection of what this world had been would be hers as well.

In time, all worlds would be hers.

'Sit down, Son'

Sheriff Hopper had a deadly-serious look on his face.

Will only knew the man in passing, but El had informed him of what had transpired while he was asleep: how he and his Mom had come to rescue him, and- vaguely -how he had ended up having to save them instead.

The adolescent gulped as Hopper stared with a stark, penetrating gaze. It was a look he wasn't accustomed to: almost an accusation. As if Will were something other than Human.

The boy knew that El didn't always tell him everything, and he could only imagine what all his destructive, psychic twin had done in his absence.

'Joyce' he nodded, as she sat down beside Will.

'I'm gonna get right to the point, Will: Your Mother and I need to know how you did those things back in the -what did your friends call it- the 'upside down"

'*Didn't have a choice*' said El. '*We would all be dead if I hadn't done something*'

'*Doesn't matter*' thought Will. '*You saved my Mom and a total stranger. I think you're in danger of becoming a good person*'

'*Not likely*' El scoffed, but his host saw past his shallow bluff, and smiled.

'Hey' said Hopper. 'I asked you a question, Son'

He blinked, and silently kicked himself for having momentarily disappeared into both their thoughts.

'Will, honey' said Joyce, taking her lastborn by the arm. 'It's okay. You can talk to Jim'

'Sorry' he said, trying to stall.

Jim cocked his head in curiosity.

'What were you smiling at?'

The boy shook his head.

'Nothing'

'*God, You're shit at this!*' scolded El.

'*I'm not very good at lying, okay!?*' Will fired back. '*Especially not to my Mom'*

'Hey! Focus!' Jim snapped his fingers.

Joyce was looking at Will strangely, and so was the Sheriff.

'Honey?' she said, a worried look on her face. 'Who are you talking to?'

'Fuck! Do you REALIZE what'll happen if the Government finds out about you?! About 'us'?!'

'I'm gonna give you to the count of ten to answer me, and by the time i'm done, you had better have some damn good answers'

'ONE!'

'I can't lie to my Mom!'

'If you don't she'll DIE, idiot! And then they'll cut you open just to see what your brain looks like!'

'TWO!'

'Hopper is the Sheriff! He can protect-'

'He can't fucking protect you from anything! They'll just pull rank on him and take you!'

'THREE!'

Will felt like he was about to explode from the tension.

'Will, please!' pleaded his poor, bewildered Mother.

'FOUR!'

'Don't you understand?!' El yelled in his head. 'I don't want to watch them to hurt you!'

'FIVE!'

'This isn't your world, El! People aren't as bad here as they were there!'

'You don't know that! You don't fucking know anything! They never cut you open, or kicked you bloody, or-'

He stopped.

'SIX!'

'El? What are you saying?'

Silence.

'SEVEN!'

Then:

I promise I'll never let them or anyone hurt you like that.

Ever'

I'm sorry, El. I didn't...'

'EIGHT!'

'No' the scarred entity replied, regaining his composure. '*Nietzsche said that what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. I hated myself for a long time.*

I even wanted to die.

But after a while, I just got angry, and I decided to take control of my own life for once'

'NINE!'

Will fell silent. There were no adequate words for such a devastating revelation. Welling-tears were all that he could give for his strange soul-mate.

'Then I met you, and you reminded me of something a close friend told me once'

'What did your friend say?' He asked.

'She said 'people with power have it to help other people'. After she...

...after she died, I stopped caring, and started killing again.

Killing for the right reason that time, but with the wrong motivation'

'TEN!'

El released a mental sigh.

'If you're going to tell them, I won't stop you. I spent most of my life being told to shut up, so i won't do it to you'

Will closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and stood.

'Just remember that no matter what happens to your friends and family: Your life comes before theirs'

'No' thought Will. 'That's not me. I can't stand by and let everyone I know get hurt'

'Time to start talking. NOW' said Hopper, his patience having long since abandoned him.

He looked to his Mother, who gave him an encouraging nod. Then he looked back to the Chief, and proceeded to shatter their world.

'I didn't survive in the upside down on my own' he began.

'Someone helped me while I was there'

Jim leaned forward intently.

'Is that how you did those things, honey?' said Joyce. 'Did someone show you how?'

He shook his head.

'No. That wasn't me that saved us. I was asleep when all that happened'

Hopper blinked.

'What?'

I can't lift people with my mind, or do 'anything'. All I can do is run and hide'

Taking another deep breath, he slowly exhaled, and continued.

'But my friend 'can'. He's the one who saved us...'

The Sheriff shook his head incredulously.

'Okay kid, look: I've seen some shit in the past few weeks that made me question everything, but i draw the line at multiple personalities'

Will couldn't believe it. After everything they had seen, and everything he had been through, his Mom and Hopper still weren't open to what he was trying to tell them.

'It's NOT multiple personalities!' he said, angrily.

'Will, please!' said his Mother, besides herself.

Jim sighed.

'If you don't want me to call my shrink, you'd better start being clear with me right now, and i mean 'crystal"

He nodded, and began.

'His name is El, and he saved me from dying'

'Where is your friend now, honey? Is he-'

Jim jumped up, almost causing Joyce to jump in turn.

'What did you just say?'

Will blinked in surprise.

'His name is El' he repeated, unsure of what was going on.

"Is'? Is he back in the upside down, or-'

'No' he interrupted' he's right here'

'Here as in...?'

The boy pointed to his head.

'He's in my mind'

Hopper released a pent-up breath, closed his eyes, and counted to ten again.

'If you hadn't said that name, I'd just think you were crazy, Son.'

He sighed.

'I want to talk to him. 'NOW'

Will's eyes fluttered open and shut several times, and Joyce had to catch him as he fell.

Then they opened again, and a very different person began speaking.

Even his mannerism had visibly changed.

'Never thought I'd see a world that isn't dead again' he said, walking over to the big, living room window, and listening to the sounds of nature outside.

'It's...beautiful'

'Honey? Is that-'

Jim waved at her to back off.

'He can hear you just fine' said El.

Jim cleared his throat, and not-Will turned to face him.

'I take it you're the one who got us away from that 'thing', whatever the hell it-'

'It's not over. She's not going to stop'

"She?" said Jim. "That fucked up walking tripod is a She?!"

He nodded.

'So that's where those no-face freaks came from. Jesus...'

Sitting back down and grabbing his whiskey flask, Hopper took a long drink before continuing.

'Tell me about your name. How'd you come by the name 'El'?"

El spent a full minute staring silently into the night.

'You gonna answer me or-?'

'That's not my name' he said, gripping the window seal. 'It's my designation... I'm subject number Eleven'

'Or at least, I was'

'Fucking hell...'

Jim took another, much longer drink, then screwed the cap back on.

'See, I think you're bullshitting me' he said, obviously feeling the effects of the alcohol. 'Because i already know somebody named El, and you're definitely not her'

'Your...reflection?' Will interjected. *'But I thought 'i' was...'*

El was just as confused as Will.

How could there be 'two' mirrors of himself in the same world?

It didn't make any sense at all.

'No' he said. 'I'm not bullshitting'

He turned back to look at Jim.

'But I think I need to meet with this other El'

Since this site is ridiculous with blocking domain names and such: Go to youtube, type in ALEX - Delete Soul for the perfect end-credits song. And thank you all for being such great fans!